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Testimony SUPPORTING
SB 753, An Act Concerning the Counting of Incarcerated Persons for Purposes of
Determining Legislative Districts
SB 1017, An Act Concerning Election Administration
HB 5318, An Act Restoring Electoral Privileges to Convicted Felons Who are on Parole
HB 6578, An Act Concerning Participation in the Electoral Process

Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, ranking members Senator Sampson, Representative Mastrofrancesco, and members of the GAE committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 733, SB 1017, HB 5318, and HB 6578.

My name is Shannon Lane, and I am a social worker. I am a faculty member at the Wurzweiler School of Social Work at Yeshiva University, where I research voting rights and access, and I work with the Nancy A. Humphreys Institute for Political Social Work at the University of Connecticut. I also serve as the Deputy Registrar of Voters for Bethany, Connecticut.

HB 5318 & SB 753

Disenfranchisement of those with felony convictions

Nationally, felony convictions keep nearly [seven million Americans](#) from voting. Given the racial bias within the criminal justice system, we know this disenfranchisement disproportionately affects people of color. 1 in 13 black voters have been disenfranchised nationally versus 1 in 56 nonblack voters. This bias is not accidental. Historically, felony disenfranchisement laws were written into state constitutions and statutes to explicitly limit the political power of African Americans and other marginalized groups. The impact of these laws today means that millions of people cannot vote because of their felony status. In addition, millions more don't vote due to an array of confusing and punitive state laws that govern voting and felony convictions.

Here in Connecticut, our voting laws for those with felony convictions are the most punitive in New England. My colleagues at the Humphreys Institute and I argued [in a recent article](#) that not only should Connecticut expand voting rights to those on parole like Rhode Island, Massachusetts and New Hampshire, but we should follow Vermont and Maine, as well as D.C., in allowing all citizens to vote. The changes to state law in this bill would put us in the group of 18 states which reinstate voting rights after prison sentences are completed. Formerly incarcerated persons who have their voting rights restored have been found to be [less likely to return to prison](#), so this change can benefit all of Connecticut.

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Additionally, the way we count prisoners in our state leads to a [dramatic distortion of political representation](#), reduces the political power of communities most impacted by the criminal justice system, and perpetuates inequalities in our state. According to the [National Conference of State Legislatures](#), nine states (California, Colorado, Delaware, Maryland, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Virginia, and Washington) have passed legislation to end prison-based gerrymandering and count incarcerated people at home for redistricting purposes, and many more are considering proposed legislation.

SB 1017 & HB 6578

I also support legislation that would make voting more accessible to all in Connecticut, including modifications of election day registration, automatic voter registration, continuing the use of election drop-boxes, and the development of electronic signatures for election-related forms. These changes have the potential to increase voter turnout, which benefits both individuals and the communities in which they live. As an elections official since 2016, I can attest that Connecticut's system of voter registration and access often sets up barriers to eligible voters who would like to participate in the political process. These barriers include long lines, frustrating processes, presentation of confusing information, and can result in Connecticut's eligible voters missing their opportunity to vote as a result. The changes to state law in this bill have the potential to alleviate many of those barriers.

Thank you for your time.